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## ***Is this a free press?***

Every journalist is aware that our constitutional pillar of press freedom has a great many nicks in it that have been inflicted over the years.

Not many journalists, however, are aware of the long list of chinks and cracks that were outlined by Michael Gartner in his farewell speech as outgoing president of the American Society of Newspaper Editors (*E&P*, April 18, page 14). J

A few of his citations have to do with restraints on publication and they deserve the attention of ASNE and other journalistic groups to eliminate them. The Smith-Mundt Act, for instance, prohibiting publication in the U.S. of material broadcast abroad by the Voice of America had the acquiescence of editors during the post-World War II era amid fear that the U.S. might copy foreign nations with a government news service. That provision is no longer necessary and should be amended.

Newspapers for years have complained about postal restrictions on the publication of lottery information. Those rules were never justified and are less so now with growing official endorsement of lotteries coast to coast. They should be wiped off the books.

Most of Gartner's citations have to do with the availability of information and not the right to publish. They reflect a libertarian view of press freedom which we do not believe has many supporters in the press.

National defense and foreign policy have been used repeatedly and unjustly to hide information from the public. As Gartner said: "You cannot get any information that the government chooses to keep secret in the interests of national defense or foreign policy." But, in spite of the abuse of secrecy in that area, we don't believe many journalists will agree that all defense and foreign policy information should be open to them.

Nor do we believe many journalists will agree that all tax returns should be public information, nor personnel and medical files, nor sources and methods of the CIA, etc., even though the information is "collected by your government with your money," as Gartner said.

We don't believe many journalists are willing to deny a right of privacy to the public. Nor will they agree that the rules of the SEC should be changed to restore the right to anyone to use the public prints to defraud the public.

After his recitation, Gartner challenged: "The press is not free in the United States."

We disagree.

If he were approaching this subject with tongue in cheek, it doesn't come across in print, and we believe those who are privileged to participate in the freest press in the world should stand up and support it.

"Is this a free press?" Gartner asked. In spite of some faults, we believe it is.